

[A Visit with Aunt Joe]

CONTINUITY

Mrs. Josephine Wood

250 Baxter St.

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Grace McCune

A VISIT WITH AUNT JOE

It was in a heavy downpour of rain, and on Friday, "the thirteenth," that I started out for an interview with Mrs. Wood Hill, and contrary to all of the old superstitious beliefs, that Friday the thirteenth is an unlucky day, I caught a ride, right to the house. But as the car turned off the pavement of Lumpkin Street, and I looked at the long, old red hill, that is Baxter [Erma?] Street, I held my breath and wondered if I was lucky after all.

My friend laughed at me, and said, "I have made it over worse looking places than this, and she made it again, after a little slipping and sliding we were there. Stepping out of the car, my foot slid into a mud hole that filled my shoe with muddy water, but I felt lucky at that. Thanking my friend for the ride, I stepped on the sidewalk and mired in the soft mud, walking up the steps, I found water standing in the walk, seeing no way around it, I went through it, and at least washed the mud off of my shoes.

As I reached the porch, the door was opened by Mrs. Woods' Hills daughter, and she said, "come right in to the fire, 2 and dry your feet or you will sure have a cold. " I stopped to

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remove my coat and hat in a large hall that was furnished with bookcases, library table and several large rocking chairs. I was then ushered in Mrs. Woods' Hills room. This was a large comfortable bedroom. The red sides of the heater, showed where the heat was coming from, that made one forget the disagreeable weather outside. Mrs. Woods' Hills other daughter, Mrs. Shetton Davis, and her baby was were in the room, and as they stood up when I went in, (Mrs. Wood's other daughter, Mrs. Shetton Davis, and her baby, was in the room, and as they stood up when I went in,) Mrs. Wood Hill said "I did not think you would be able to get out in all this rain, but I am so glad that you did for it will sure help pass away this bad day.

Mrs. Wood Hill suggested that she have a fire made in the living room, as she was afraid the baby might worry me. The thought of going in a cold room was too much for me, I said the baby would not worry me, and it was so warm and comfortable where we were: that decided it, and we remained in Mrs. Woods Hills room. I had made the appointment several days before with Mrs. Wood Hill. After she insisted that I move nearer the stove, where my feet would dry. She started talking.

"I don't know if I will be able to tell you anything that will be of any interest or not, for I was born and raised in the country. My mother and father, Jesse Robert and 3 Martha Hill Mary [Head?] were living between here and Barnett Shoals and about two miles from Whitehall. When I was still very small, my daddy moved to Whitehall, but it was called Georgia Factory then, and about the first thing that I can remember that would be important is when Sherman came through Georgia.

"We were living at Georgia Factory then, and it was not like it is now. Every house and lot was fenced off to itself. The White's had their home there also at that time. All the men that were not too old to go was in the war, except the White's, they were at home. Everyone was scared when they heard the Yankee's were coming, and people buried everything they could.

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"The Yankees came through Franklin and Hart County, just tore up everything as they came through, took all the stock, cows, horses, mules and killed the hogs in the pens, and carried them along for the yankee soldiers to eat, went through houses also, took anything they wanted especially everything they had to eat, and what they didn't want, they tore it up so badly that the people could not use it any more.

"My grandfather lived on Mr. Mauldin's place near Lavonia, Ga. and the yankees came by their place. Mr. Mauldin got all his provisions and other things buried before they got there. He took up the floor of his kitchen and buried his things there. But my grandfather was not so lucky, as they caught him while he was trying 4 to hide his provisions. Them yankees took every bite they had to eat. Grandmother got down on her knees, prayed and begged them to leave her just enough of syrup and bread for her children's breakfast, but they wouldn't do even that, just poured the syrup out on the ground, and left them without anything to eat.

"At that time Augusta was the nearest place that you could buy anything, and it was a five day's trip from Grandfather's to Augusta in a wagon, and that was the only way people traveled then. One of my aunts had raised a little heifer and she cried and begged them not to take her calf, but to leave her just that one thing, but it was carried off with the rest of the stock. They also killed their hogs and carried them off. After the Yankees left, Mr. Mauldin came down to Grandfathers, and told him that he would let him have enough to eat to last him until he could get to Augusta and buy something to eat.

"When they got near Georgia Factory, the people were so scared they didn't know what to do, for there was no one there except women and children, and they were working in the mill to make a living for the men were fighting. All of the White's left and came to Athens to hide, except old man White's oldest son, Jim, he stayed hid out down on the river in an old hollow tree, with some blankets to sleep on.

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There was just one old man, Mr. Connelly, who was so old that he couldn't hardly get about left to look out for all the women and children. I was just about four 5 years old at that time and I guess I was scared so bad, is why I remembered so well. We children climbed up on the gate post to watch as the long line of yankees could be seen coming down the long hill. They said there were four hundred yankees in that company.

"They were searching the houses as they came to them, said they were hunting for all the men, [sex?] and that they were going to kill all the rich folks. They just went through everything in the houses. Then they went to the mill, said they were going to burn it up. The women got down on their knees and begged them not to burn up the mill, for that was the only way they had to make a living for their children.

"At first the soldiers would not listen to the women. Then they went into the mill, got all the cloth and thread, even tore the cloth off of the looms. Then they divided it among the women, and told them that they would kill them if they gave any of it back to the Whites. I guess you know that Whites run the mill at that time. Next, they went to the company store. Of course, it was locked up. They just busted out the doors and windows, went in, and brought out everything that was in it, piled it all up in front of the store. They then called all of the women on the place, divided all the stuff up among them, made them hold out their aprons and poured syrup in them. One woman asked them to let her get a pan to put the syrup in, but they told her to take that way or not at all.

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"They stayed around there for several days, hunting for the Whites, and the old man Connelly was slipping something to eat to Jim White in the old hollow tree when he could. When they left, people did not see anything of them for about a week, and everyone just knew they were gone. Jim White came up to the Connelly's one day to get him something to eat, and just as soon as he got in the house, someone run to the door and said, the Yankees are coming. Mr. White was scared so bad, he didn't know what to do, because he knew they would kill him if they found him. Mrs. Connelly had more mind about her than

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anyone else for she pulled the covers off the bed, and made him get between the feather bed and mattress.

The Yankees were searching the houses again and when some of them got to her house, she was very busy making the bed. They asked her if any of the Whites were hid around there anywhere, and being a very truthful woman, she would not tell a story about it, but she didn't say there was either. She just told them that they could search the place and see if they could find anything. She told them to look upstairs, and in the kitchen, talking all the time to keep them from looking at the bed, finally tucking the cover around tight, she carried them out to search the smokehouse. After she got them out of the house, Mr. Connelly raised one corner of the cover a little so that Mr. White would not smother. But them Yankees stayed around there so long that he was almost 7 dead. They just tore up the White home, even took the girls dresses out and gave them to the mill women, but after they left that time, they never came back any more.

"Times were sure different in them days from what they are today. Why, I never got to go to school much, as the only time we went to school was when all the work in the field was done, and then we would have to walk two or three miles. And had to stay all day then. I remember one time when I was seven, we had a celebration at the Old Standing Methodist Church. They used it for a school during the week, and church on Sunday. But this was a school celebration, people call them entertainments now. The children all had to recite. They were marched inside the church. The people were all on the outside under the trees where seats or benches had been fixed for them to sit on. The children would come out one at a time to say their piece. When it came time for me to go out I was just scared so bad, that I was shaking all over, and it wasn't much that I had to say, let me see, I believe I can even say that now. The name of it was 'I am five years old Today' and went like this: 'One I was a very little child And months have passed since then I am bigger and have taller grown I am five years old today. 'At first I could not talk or walk But now I can talk and walk about Can eat, run and play all day long For I am five years old today.

Not much to get scared about was it, but I sure had stage fright then, only we didn't know what that was, and because I said I was five years old, every one thought I was five instead of seven.

“But them school celebration was big days, everybody went, because they didn't have many places to go then. They would always have dinner on the ground, and you know right there in that old church was the first preaching I ever remember hearing. The old Preacher, Ellison Stone, was the preacher, but I still think they were good old days.

“I went to school at the paper mill and then at Princeton also. It was there at Princeton that we hated to go so bad, for we had a man teacher, Mr. Marion Dunaway and he was the meanest man I ever saw, none of the children liked him. He didn't have but one arm, but he sure would whip the little children. The big boys that he was afraid of, he would make them stand in front of the classes, on one foot. The spring where we got water was a pretty good distance from the school, or rather church, for he taught school in the church. And he would not let us get a drink of water, even at dinner time, we were not allowed to leave the school grounds unless we lived near enough to go home for dinner.

“One day it rained awful hard, and there was mud holes out in the yard, and we took our tin cups and drank water out of those mud holes. I told my father about that, and he was so mad, he bought a bucket and dipper for me to 9 carry to school, and said Mr. Dunaway had better let us have water to drink. The next morning I carried the bucket and dipper to school with me. He wanted to know what I brought that thing to school for, I told him what my father said, and he sent one of the older boys to the spring for a bucket of water and we did not have any more trouble about getting water.

“The older boys liked to worry him. One day, they didn't know their lesson, and he put two of them in a small closet under the altar and told them they had to stay there. Later he got uneasy about them, afraid that they might smother, and he tried to get them to come out.

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They refused told him they were going to stay there all night, and let the people find them there, then they would know what kind of a man they were paying to teach school. This scared him, for he knew that none of the children liked him and that it would ruin him. So he begged, and pleaded with them, but they worried him till time to go home before they would come out. and how we kids did enjoy seeing him beg.

“His children went to school also, and his girl Cora and I were good friends. She was always wanting me to go home with her and spend the night. I went one time but never wanted to go again. For he made us study until eight o'clock and then go to bed. He wouldn't let us play at all. He was just as mean at home as he was at school.

“I tell you things and times are changed. I was raised by candle lights for we didn't even have oil lamps 10 for a long time and I bet I have made a million candles. We had molds to make them, put a string in then poured the hot tallow on them and they were put aside to get cold. We had homemade wooden candles sticks to burn the candles in. That was all the light we had for years.

“We burned oak and hickory wood in the fireplace, and let me tell you something right now, that fire was very carefully covered at night. For matches were scarce and hard to get. If we went visiting and our fire went out, then we had to borrow a little fire from our nearest neighbor, or start it with Flint and gun powder. I have watched my father start it that way many a time.

“We cooked on fireplaces too, had what we called pot racks. They were built in the fireplace and we hung the pots on them to boil, baked in ovens, and things seemed much better then than they do now. People were hardly ever sick. Why, I was nine years old before I ever heard of anybody dying. Then a little Negro boy died not so far from our place. Mamma told us that she would carry us to see him, for they was going to bury him down in the ground. I couldn't believe that he was dead, and told mamam that he was just asleep. We just couldn't believe that he was really deed, until we saw him buried.

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"I guess I was in the first cyclone that was ever in Georgia. I was small, but was large enough to work in the field. Me and my little brother, wanted to go to see our grandmother. I remember that it was one Saturday morning. Mama at first said we could go. Then she said we had better wait, as it looked like [it?] might rain. We went on to the field, and about two hours later, the sun came out. father came to the field and told us that we could go now, for they didn't think it was going to rain.

"It was about four miles to grandma's house and we had to walk, part of the way was through woods, but we were use to it and did not mind the walk. It didn't seem like we had got anyway until it began to turn so dark, and the wind started blowing, and when we got through the wood we could hardly see how to walk, and the wind was getting worse, we started to run, for we was really scared. Just as we got in sight of grandma's house it began to pour down rain, and we was soaked through to the skin, and do you know that wind blow down most of the trees in those woods that we had just come through. Houses, barns, and stables were torn up all through that section and a man that owned a fine tract of wood about ten miles square, lost every tree in it. Several different people had been trying to buy the timber from him and he wouldn't sell, holding it for more money. Folks said that was why everyone of his trees were torn up by the roots. It rained so hard, that two cows had to swim across the road in front of grandma's house. It was an awful storm and people said it was the worst 12 one they had ever heard of.

Yes, I was raised in the country and we have had to card and spin the thread to make our clothes. Mama would weave the cloth and I used to make my own stockings knit cotton for summer, and for winter we had yarn stockings, and sometimes we would dye the thread. We used dyes made out of barks. Red oak bark and elder made a light red. Dogwood bark and alder, made a dark purple, almost black.

"Mens suits were all made out of jeans, and I want you to know we didn't have no sewing machines either. It was all done with our hands. Mama could really make a nice suit of

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clothes, and our underwear was made out of cloth that they called drilling. It was not like the drilling you buy now, for it was made at home.

“Church days, especially protracted meetings was big times for country folks. Everybody went. You could see more wagon and yes, ox carts to. Why, I have went to meeting many a time in an old ox cart, enjoyed it to. But I would like to see some of you young folks today have to start out some place in an ox cart, but you wouldn't go often. Why child, I don't even remember seeing a buggy until after I was married.

My father moved near Watkinsville and was running a sawmill, and that is how I met my husband. He came to work in the saw mill for my father and he boarded at our house. He worked for his board and ten dollars a month.

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I knew when I learned his name that I would marry him. At least I was pretty sure, for a friend of mine and I had tried our fortune a short time back and that was the name I found.

“Oh, and you want to know how we tried fortunes do you? Well, I'll tell you, but you will laugh at it. But I tell you right now young lady, folks didn't laugh at things back in them days. Anyway laugh if you want to, here is what we did.

On the last night in April after sundown, we walked backwards to a wheat field. Then we took a white handkerchief and threw it over our right shoulder. Of course we left it there, but we went back in the morning before sun up (which was the first day of May) walked backwards, til we reached our handkerchiefs, turned around and picked them up. On mine was A. J. Wood. It looked more like a worm had just woven around on the handkerchief, but anyway the name was there and I had never met him until he came to our house to stay, but I married him just the same.

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"Now if you will excuse me, I will go in the kitchen and fix the cornbread for dinner. These girls of mine are pretty good cooks, but they can't make my cornbread to suit me. I know you don't mind resting a little anyway and I will be right back.

The baby had played until it had worn its self out and was sleeping in Mrs. Wood Hills bed. There was no one else in the room and as I rested I noticed the old 14 dresser, made of walnut, with its large mirror. There was the washstand to match it, both old, but lovely and showed that they had been well cared for. There was also a few real old pictures on the walls, that must have been some of the older members of the family. At this time the baby woke up and wanted to get up. His mother came in just as I started to get him. She laughed and said, "I don't expect he would have let you take him, as he seems to afraid of strangers. But it wasn't but a few minutes until he was in my lap playing with my pencil.

Mrs. Wood Hill came back and said, Well how in the world did you get that baby, but she was pleased that I had been able to make friend with her baby as she called it. Just as she started to talk, someone at the door called Aunt Joe Jerry, as she went to see who it was, her daughter, said, everyone calls mama Aunt Joe Jerry, and they have called her that for years, for mama will be 78 next month.

As Mrs, Wood Hill came back in the room, she said, I heard her telling you how old I am, but do you think I look that old? I looked at her, still very straight, tall and just medium weight, dressed in a neat blue house dress, her hair and she really had plenty of that, was between an auborn and born and there were mighty few gray hairs in it was done up on the top of her head. She didn't look as if she could be that old and I said so, that she didn't look a day over fifty. This pleased her, but she said, "Child, I have been here a long time. Why; I have 36 grandchildren and 30 great grandchildren so 15 you see I am an old woman. But you can just lay your book and pencil down for dinner is just about ready. I told her that was all right to go right on and eat her dinner. But she said, "young lady, as long as you are here, you are going to eat with us, that is if you think you can eat what we eat. Of course, we haven't got so much, but it will keep you from getting hungry. And

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I hope you want refuse to eat with me for I do like to have company and I am not use to anyone refussing to eat with us. Seeing that she would be really offended, I thanked her and said I would be glad to eat with her.

We ate dinner in the kitchen. As we went through the large dinning room to the kitchen, Mrs. Wood said, "It is such a bad day and so cold that I thought you might like to eat in the kitchen. As she opened the door, I didn't blame her. The kitchen was small, and a large wood range in which a big fire was going made the room cozy and comfortable, a large cabinet, a small square dining table and chairs lamost filled the room.

After Mrs. Wood Hill gave thanks for the meal, she said, "I wanted you to see the bench at the back of the table. All my children have eat on that old bench, and it is still a good one. Not even the back has come off and I have raised some pretty rough boys, but it has stood it all. It was made for my children and I would not take anything for it.

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After we had finished the delicious dinner, and I did not blame Mrs. Wood Hill for liking her cornbread for I don't think I ever ate any just like it. We went back to Mrs. Wood Hill 's room, and she said, "I will have to see if I can remember where I left off. I think I was telling you about finding out about my husband.

"But it was not very long after he came to our house to board, before we had decided that we wanted to get married. When he finally got up the nerve to ask mama for me, I got scared and went to stay with Grandma for a few days. For I knew that mama would be mad, and I didn't want to be there. But she told us both that if we married, we was sure going to marry at home. And I didn't have any business getting married young as I was, for I was just fifteen.

"It was in July when I got married. Lord, but we had a time getting married. July was the time of year for protracted meetings in the country, and the preacher we had engaged to marry us was called away to preach at one of these meetings, and did not get back

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in time to marry us. Some of the boys started out to hunt up another preacher, but they didn't have any luck in finding one. And some of them just happened to see the old Judge Thomas, going along the road, and he was also a Justice of Peace. They stopped him and he married us. After we were married all of us went on to High Shoals,

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Georgia to preaching. And yes, we went in an old two horse wagon.

"We were living near Watkinsville when I got married. And since that time I have lived most all over Oconee County. Mr. Wood Hill wouldn't stay on the farm, he didn't know much about farming and he was a good carpenter, so not long after we married we moved to Athens.

It was about this time that they finished building the Central of Georgia railroad to Athens. The man, I think his name was Goobsy, that had the contract to build the railroad died before he finished it, but his wife took it up where he left off and finished the job. We used to go and watch them working on Sunday, for she worked just the same on Sunday as any other day. She wore two big pistols strapped around her waist, and she could curse them negroes like a man made them work to. She would try to get people to work on Sunday, the white men wouldn't do it, and she would curse them and tell them to get away from the place then.

"There was only one railroad here when I came to Athens and that was the old Ga. railroad, and it had been here for a long, long time. Why, my father left on the old Georgia railroad when he went to the war. All these other railroads have come to Athens since I have. So you know I have been here a long time.

I remember the first circus that ever come here.

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It was over in East Athens near the old Georgia depot. I know you have heard about the old depot, being across the river on Carrs Hill. I went to the circus, but I have never been in one since. I go to see the parades, when they have them but I have never cared anything about going in another circus.

"I used to go to fairs also, when they had them out at the old fairground. The first fairground here that I remember anything about was between here and Princeton. There was a wedding at the fairground. at one of the fairs. I don't remember who the couple was, but it was called the cotton wedding. They were dressed in cotton. Just as it come from the gin. The cotton was just laid on them in layers, until their clothes were completely covered with cotton. I guess there was about five or six thousand people there to see that wedding.

"Do you know that I have traveled in the old covered wagons? Well, I have even if it wasn't such a long ways off. We moved from here to Hartwell at one time, while Mr. Wood Hill did some work there, and when we come back to see the folks, we came in an old covered wagon. Couldn't make the trip in one day, and we camped at night. We would bring our frying pan and something to cook along with us and we slept in the wagon at night.

"Yes, we enjoyed it. We built a fire, cooked our supper, of course we would always stop at some place where we could get plenty of water. Most all the times 19 then you could always find some one else camping also, and sit around the camp fires and talk awhile, then crawl in our wagon and sleep until morning. Those were not such bad times. We had plenty and enjoyed it, more I think than people do now.

"We did not have good bridges back in those days, and almost everytime it came a real hard rain the water would get up and wash the bridges away. It was nothing unusual then to start somewhere that you had to cross a creek or river and find the bridge gone. And the Simton Bridge was worse than any of the others, or at least it seemed that way.

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"I started to see mama one day and she lived at Whitehall. I had to cross the old Simton bridge and as usual it had washed away and they had a ferry boat to carry people across the river. I had my baby with me and some clothes for it in an old satchel. We got in the boat alright and across the river. As we reached the other bank the boy that was paddling the boat jumped out and held the rope to hold the boat steady for me to step. out.

"Just as I stood up, over the boat went and into the river went me and my baby. I managed to hold on to the baby but of course we were both soaked to the skin and it was in November and cold, lord how cold it was. I started to wade out for it was not so deep and I saw my satchel floating down the river with my babies' clothes 20 in it. I knew I had to have it, so I waded on down the river until I got my satchel, then I guess I was crazy for instead of getting out of the river there, I waded right on back up the river to where the boat turned over.

"I was cold and shivering as I crawled out on the bank with my baby in one arm and my satchel in my other hand. The boy was just standing there scared so bad he didn't know what to do, but he couldn't help the boat turning over. I told him I was cold. He got busy then and built up a big fire on the river bank. I was a sight for we wore more clothes then than people do now, and I felt like I had on more than I really did, for they were dripping water. The baby was cold and crying all its clothes were wet in the satchel. I couldn't walk with all my wet clothes hanging to me. So I pulled off all I could and my yarn stockings and I walked the rest of the way to Whitehall. I just knew it would kill me and the baby too, but you know it didn't even make us sick.

Did I tell you about Mr. Wood Hill 's father? He was captured by the Indians right after he was married. They carried him off and it was three years before he was able to get away from them. After they captured him and carried him to their camp, he was made to marry an Indian girl. It was three years before he was trusted enough to let him get out by himself. Then he was sent to a town for supplies.

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"He was watched even then, but managed to get away. Left the mules and wagon tied in front of a store and slipped out. It took him a long time to get back home to his family. His wife said that he was never the same again, and that he stayed with the Indians so long that it was a long time before they could get him to talk much. And that most of the time when they talked to him, he would only give a grunt as an answer. I tell you people had to go through many things back in those old days.

"I don't know if you have ever heard it or not, but when folks did die back in those times, it was not like it is now. You couldn't just call an undertaker and turn everything over to them. But instead the neighbors come in and did what they could. Of course, they embalm the corpse, but they washed and dress-it, the men had to make the coffins, and they were just made out of plans and the women lined them with some kind of cloth.

"But those dear old neighbors. They would manage by doing each others work, so that some of them could be with the family until after the funeral at least, and people for miles and miles away come when there was death or sickness in a home, and went to the funeral and burying. After I got older I have helped my father many a time make a coffin when someone died.

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They went to funerals in wagons and ox carts. The coffin was placed in one wagon and I have even seen the pallbearers riding on top of the coffin to the funeral. People just had to do all kinds of ways, but I think they were closer to each other then than they are today, and more ready to help each other out in any way they could.

"I have had my good times and my troubles as everyone has. We had ten children and raised nine of them to be grown and married. I have still got seven of them living. As I told you 36 grandchildren and 30 great grandchildren. I hope if I live and nothing happens to me that I can have all them together with me at one time this summer and that will be a

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happy time for me. Mr. Wood Hill has been gone a long time, but we learned from the old days that we have to take things as the Lord sends them to us.

"I don't think of anything else now that you would care to know." Realizing that she was tired and needed to rest, I prepared to leave. Thanking her for the nice story and the invitation to have dinner with her, as I put my coat and hat to leave, she said, "I have certainly enjoyed heaving you for you have helped me pass away a day that would have been long and lonesome. I don't want you to forget to come back to see me for I will be glad for you to come at any time you can. Come some Sunday and spend the day and you will see most of my 23 children then. As all of them that live around here come to see me on Sunday.

As the door closed behind me, I felt the cold and rain again. It was a job to walk down the old rel hill and I decied I would try to make my next visit when it wasn't raining.